



CNI

PRESS WATCH - As Brexit looms it suits the south to talk of reunification

Well, now. Whooping and cheering happened behind doors here and there but cavalcades did not fill the streets.

Nationalists, it has been generally agreed, should shun triumphalism and be sensitive to unionists, struggling to adjust to losing their Stormont majority after almost a century. And yet up the road from Dublin, instead of the usual delicacy about unionist feelings, comes talk of planning for reunification. That's Micheal Martin's promised White Paper, swift on the heels of the Taoiseach across the wide Atlantic all but promising a vote for the presidency – to that trendy phenomenon the 'diaspora', and the Irish in the north, *writes Fionnuala O' Connor in The Irish News.*

Opinion in the Republic, in particular in the political class, usually hears talk of reunification as dangerous, threatening stuff. That was before Martin McGuinness resigned and Arlene-Awareness broke out. Or rather it was before the threat of Brexit to Ireland north and south sank in. Now Brexit is cited as reason enough to be considering unification. In a measured way, as a political exercise, as statesmanlike Enda has tried to stitch it into EU thinking, so that Northern Ireland rejoins the EU as of right if Ireland is united.

Northern nationalists have pleaded for decades with the southern state for official, practical recognition of their Irishness, for visible solidarity, Dáil speaking rights. But the solid diplomacy that produced the Anglo-Irish and Good Friday agreements was an exception to the rule.

The south has shunned talk about ending partition - except for wailing, in pre-Troubles election campaigns, about the fourth green field. The Fianna Fáil leader was on to that, in an Irish Times interview taking him through his unpublished paper. Dates and timetabling are out, because that would sound like 'acceleration towards unity' and send unionists 'back into their trenches'. This would be a blueprint

‘moving well beyond the fourth green field.’ The FF plan contains 12 concrete ideas to improve relations including aligning school curricula starting with English and history; Heaney and Frank McGuinness for example.

Catch-up time for Michéal. There was Enda Kenny parading on Sunday in Philadelphia with people wearing tricolour sashes, before announcing the long-mooted referendum on a vote for the Irish abroad. ‘Abroad’ to include the north. Available, if passed, no sooner than 2025. But for Kenny, coming home to make a promised statement on his future, this is a last hurrah, and one jump ahead of the Sinn Féin president performing at St Patrick’s Day events across the USA. Can Gerry Adams get in and out of America without someone suggesting he must surely run for president in 2025? Which would surely push unionists by the thousands to claim their Irish passports and vote him down.

It suits the Adams team now to maintain that Brexit was a hot topic on the doorsteps. In Derry and along the border maybe, but Sinn Féin spent little energy on the EU referendum. It clearly struck no instinctive chords; old anti-EU sentiment dies hard. Though that was easily

swallowed in favour of bashing People Before Profit as Brexiteers.

Foster simply disregarded the Northern Ireland majority for Remain, and Sinn Féin sat tight. There's what happened, and there is what is supposed to have happened.. The litany of DUP bad behaviour, the list of things that have to be fixed didn't come out of the blue, but Sinn Féin have not been bursting to get out of Stormont for years past.

Scandal followed scandal, with every sign that the DUP believed themselves untouchable, well before RHI arrived. Gregory Campbell's unfunny parodies of Irish brought no slap-down from his party; instead he became conference clown in succession to Sammy Wilson.

In the last twelve days unionists have got no farther than talk about unionist pacts in future elections as a last desperate throw, and complaints that talk of border polls is destabilising. Having Adams back on the northern stage adds to the unsettling effect. And now it's 'aligning' what schools teach?

Arlene Foster meanwhile has been claiming Sinn Féin 'demonised' her. It was republicans at the start of the peace process who complained about being demonised, a word that loyalist

paramilitaries trying out politics speedily took up. Unionists long ago adopted the victim stance they used to mock at in nationalists.

The DUP leader told the Impartial Reporter, in the course of her qualified apology for her crocodile jibe last week, that people ‘lecture about respect, integrity and equality.’ There needed to be ‘mutual respect for those of us from a British/Orange culture.’

That will take some aligning.

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